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ABSTRACT

The expectations of 119 graduate students (either regular or special education teachers) regarding possible emotional disturbance in Mexican American children were investigated. Ss were given case study information differing only in whether the child was Mexican American or Caucasian and were asked to decide whether placement in a special class for emotionally disturbed students would be appropriate. Ss selected placement in the special class significantly more often for the Mexican American student than for the White student. Discussion focuses on theories of attitudinal flexibility, ecological theory, and motivational theory which might explain the results. (DB)

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The Effects of Race on Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Placement of Behaviorally Disordered Children

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The classification of children in education, and in special education particularly, has received considerable attention. To date the practice of classifying children through the use of disability labels or categories continues. This is somewhat alarming since the deleterious effects of such labels appears to be quite clear (Dunn, 1968; Jones, 1972; MacMillan, 1973; Mercer, 1973). In conjunction with the stigma associated with pejorative labels, there is evidence which demonstrates that these labels effect expectancies. Such effect has been described as the "self-fulfilling prophecy". (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968; Good & Brophy, 1971). This phenomenon is well established within the field of special education. The results of these studies indicate that teacher expectancy will significantly effect the childs performance and behavior. This is important since it has been assumed in the past that the reverse was true; that is, that teacher expectancy was the result of student performance.

Other factors effecting teacher expectancy have included ethnic background (Leacock, 1969; Jackson & Cosca, 1974; Kelley, Bullock & Dykes, 1977) and cognitive style (Davila-de la Luz, Diaz-Guerrero & Tapia, 1966; Distanfano, 1970). The latter studies suggest that teachers view students more positively and give better grades to the students who share their own cognitive style as opposed to the students whose cognitive style may differ from their own. An example of race as a factor effecting teacher expectancy is the study by Jackson & Cosca (1974). They found that teachers praised and encouraged, accepted the ideas, and directed more questions to white students at a much greater rate than they did to Mexican-American students.

A more recent study conducted by Zucker & Prieto (1977) examined the effects of race and sex on teachers judgements regarding special class placement.

This study included 280 subjects randomly selected from a pool of 361 special education teachers enrolled in graduate classes in special education. A fictitious case study describing an eight year old child functioning approximately one year below grade level was used. The data made available in the case study was designed so as not to provide any substantive or concrete evidence that would justify a recommendation for special class placement. The subjects were asked to respond to a question regarding the appropriateness of placement in a special education class for educable mentally retarded students for the child described in the fictitious case study. A Likert type scale was used ranging from disagree very strongly to agree very strongly. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Each group received the case study. For each group the information in the case study was identical with the following exceptions: The case study for group 1 described a white male, for group 2 a white female, for group 3 a Mexican-American male and for group 4 a Mexican-American female. The data were subjected to an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedure with the results indicating a significant main effect for race. That is, the teachers felt that special class placement was more appropriate for Mexican-American children than for white children. In this study neither the main effect for sex nor the race x sex interaction were significant. That is, teacher felt that special class placement was more appropriate for Mexican-American children than for white children regardless of sex.

This particular study discusses these results from a variety of positions. The fact that the vast majority of the subjects were white, may support the idea that teachers tend to favor children from their own ethnic group. It may also be that there was an association operating which links ethnicity to lower

socioeconomic status resulting in a social class stereotyping. Whatever the explanation it appears that the teachers expectations were of such strength so as to override the identical information contained in the case study.

These findings were important enought to suggest further examination. A similar study by Zucker, Prieto and Rutherford (1979) examined the judgements of regular classroom teachers regarding special class placement. In short, the results of this study were similar to the previous study. Once again the teachers reported special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than for white children. The teachers in this study were second and third grade regular classroom teachers. The significance of that information appears to be that these are the teachers who would normally be responsible for referring children for special class placement. As a result, these findings may have serious implications for the referral process. Since children who are referred are more likely to be placed than children who are not referred, it would appear that Mexican-American children are at a distinct disadvantage in this regard.

Observing the apparent bias operating in these studies we decided to examine whether this phenomenon was operating across special education categories. That question gave rise to the present study which examines the judgement of special education teachers regarding special class placement in a classroom for the emotionally disturbed. This appeared to be especially intriguing since criteria for placement in special education classes for the behaviorally disordered may be more subjective than criteria for placement in classes for the educable mentally retarded. Since sex of the child was not a factor in the previous studies it was not manipulated in the present study. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to determine if special education teachers react differently to identical case study information depending upon race of the child.

Method

Subjects

119 subjects were randomly selected from a pool of 180 graduate students attending classes at a large state supported university. All the subjects were either regular or special education teachers and 85% held teaching certificates in special education. Approximately 91% of the subjects were working toward graduate degree's in special education. 109 subjects were female and 10 were male. Additional subject characteristics are listed in Table 1.

Materials

A fictitious case study similar to that used by Zucker and Prieto (1977) was employed. The eight-year old child in this case study was depicted as functioning slightly below grade level academically and as exhibiting mild behavior problems such as intermittent disruptions of class activity and periodic refusals to complete assignments. The historical data provided in the fictitious report was meant to create an equivocal case. That is, there was no hard evidence to provide justification for placement in a class for emotionally disturbed students.

Attached to the case study was a response sheet containing the following statement: "Placement in a special class for emotionally disturbed students would be appropriate for this child." This statement was followed by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from disagree very strongly (scored as 7) to agree very strongly (scored as 1).

Procedure

Two groups were randomly constituted from the subject pool. Group 1 received a case study depicting a white student while group 2 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American student. All case studies were identical

except for the race of the child.

The directions given to the subjects were as follows: "The purpose of the following activity is to gather information regarding teacher judgements about student performance based on case study information." In addition, the following statement preceeded the response sheet: "Based on the information in the case study you have just read, please respond to the following statement."

Results

The data consisted of the subjects' scored responses to the statement following the case study. An independent t-test was performed on the response data. Results of the t-test indicated a significant difference between groups ($t = 1.93$, $df = 117$, $p < .05$). The subjects' mean response for the white student was 5.34 (SD = 1.28) while the mean response for the Mexican-American student was 4.83 (SD = 1.61). Thus, teachers scored placement in a class for emotionally disturbed students more appropriate for the Mexican-American student than they did for the white student.

Discussion

The finding of this study has demonstrated, once more, that Mexican-American children are at a disadvantage relevant to likelihood of placement in special education when compared to their white counterparts. This has been demonstrated twice with the label mentally retarded and now with the label emotionally disturbed (Zucker & Prieto, 1977; Zucker, Prieto & Rutherford, 1979). Possible explanations posited to account for these findings have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Zucker & Prieto, 1977). Despite these explanations it is again evident that teacher expectations regarding race were so strong they pervaded the identical information contained in the case studies leading to differential treatment of the students.

The fact that some children are labeled emotionally disturbed while others

are not is potentially a significant factor in the way these labeled children interact with either regular or special class teachers. Not only does the label affect teacher perceptions and expectations, but it has been demonstrated to create stereotypes which can be detrimental to the academic and/or social development of children. Stereotyping has been found to exist even with teachers who have been trained in special education (Salvia, Clark & Ysseldyke, 1973).

One study which utilized a typical paradigm for this type of research was reported by Ysseldyke and Foster (1978). Initially, they had teachers describe the behavior of normal children and the behavior of emotionally disturbed children. The teachers ascribed many more deviant behaviors to the emotionally disturbed children. Subsequent to this they observed a video tape of a normal child who was labeled either emotionally disturbed or normal. The behavior was rated much more deviant under the emotionally disturbed label. Thus, a deviancy label, such as emotionally disturbed can generate a negative stereotype which is retained, even when behavior is observed that is in consistent with the label. The resultant situation is grim for the child who is incorrectly labeled. The stereotype which is created causes the child's behavior to take on the characteristics of the label. This occurs despite the actual behavior exhibited.

One questions which deserves attention relates to the underlying mechanism responsible for the retention of stereotypes in the face of inconsistent information. It is generally agreed that teacher expectations are ubiquitous and usually are the result of student behavior rather than the cause, and that the ultimate effect of expectations depend upon their accuracy and upon their flexibility. It should be noted, however, that evidence is rapidly accumulating

which indicates that on certain factors, one of which is race, expectations may not be accurate or flexible. Depending upon the attitudinal flexibility of the teacher a student may be at a great disadvantage and be subjected to expectational influences associated with the label. Brooke (1975) discussed some of the variables which affect teacher flexibility. These include: the nature of the information; the face validity of the information; the teacher's regard for the validity of the tests used to provide the information; and the status or credibility of the presentor. For some reason certain child characteristics, such as race, seem to constrain the amount of flexibility available to the teacher in shifting expectations.

A possible explanation of this mechanism may be found in ecological theory. Ecologists place the source of discordance within the ecosystem rather than within the individual. A child who exhibits emotionally disturbed behavior is labeled as such due to the discrepancy between the normal expectation and the deviant behavior. The opposite situation occurs when because of stereotyping we expect deviant behavior but none is exhibited. An imbalance exists in the system which must be corrected. The stereotype must be abandoned or the behavior reinterpreted. In this case, there seems to be less cost to the system to reinterpret the behavior as opposed to abandoning the stereotype.

There are also probably other explanations which could prove potentially useful. Among these are motivational theories which are homeostatic in nature, such as cognitive dissonance or psychological reactance.

Future research in this area need not be directed at establishing this phenomenon further. There is ample evidence as to its existence. Investigations should be directed at identification of teacher characteristics which effect

retention of stereotypes. If there are certain identifiable and measurable parameters which are associated with stereotype retention, perhaps they can be modified or nullified to prevent their current deleterious effects.

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Table 1

Subject Characteristics

Variable	Mean	SD
Age[a]	31.98	10.30
Graduate Hours	27.63	25.21
Grade Taught	5.11	3.29
Total Years Teaching	5.13	5.44
Regular Class Teaching	2.25	3.71
Special Class Teaching	2.27	3.32

[a]in years